DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 254 896 EA 017 528

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TITLE Analyzing and Evaluating Supervisory Practice.
PUB DATE 23 Mar 85
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Chicago, IL, March 22-26, 1985).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrative Organization; *Administrator Evaluation; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Methods; *Improvement Programs; Models; Needs Assessment; Problem Solving; *Program Development; *School Supervision
IDENTIFIERS Clinical Supervision

ABSTRACT

Instructional supervision, despite the lack of evidence for its value, can potentially help improve instruction and promote educators' professional growth. To realize this potential, schools should analyze their supervisory practice according to these four premises: (1) that each school district and each school has unique organizational characteristics that influence the results of supervision; (2) that changes in organizational structure are needed to support supervisory practice; (3) that supervision must be viewed in the context of a complex organizational environment; and (4) that the school organization must have built-in problem-solving capacity to maintain effective supervision. An outline of one school's assessment project and a list of questions discussed during this activity illustrate such analysis. Once it has analyzed its organization and determined its supervisory needs, a school should design an explicit and thorough program of supervision, test it, and evaluate it according to whether the problems have been solved, whether the solutions are attainable within available resources, and whether the solutions will encourage school personnel to be problem solvers in the future. (MCG)

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ANALYZING AND EVALUATING SUPERVISORY PRACTICE

by

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Presented at the March, 1985, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Conference in Chicago, Illinois, March 23, 1985

EA 017 528

INTRODUCTION

There is in schools a process which we believe has the potential for helping educators within the schools to achieve excellence in education. This process is called instructional supervision. Instructional supervision has been defined as a process for improving instruction and for promoting the professional growth of teachers and other education specialists (Seager, 1978). There is, however, no evidence that instructional supervision is effective--there are no data to suggest that supervision makes a difference. Dr. Nolan Estes[1] reminded of this recently in a presentation he made to the Council of Professors of Instructional Supervision at the University of Texas at Austin. To paraphrase Dr. Estes, he said...

> One of the reasons that school superintendents are not more deeply committed to instructional supervision is that it is not clear that supervision makes any difference in schools.

Although instructional supervision has not been shown to be effective, we passionately believe that it can make a difference in schools. To increase the effectiveness of instructional supervision, we hypothesize that four basic premises must guide school efforts toward this goal.

Premise A: to increase the effectiveness of supervision, it must be recognized that each school district and, indeed, each school within a district has unique organizational characteristics which may either constrain or enhance the effectiveness of supervision.

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[1] Dr. Estes is the former Superintendent of the Dallas Independent School district (Texas). He is currently a faculty member in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Texas at Austin.

Premise B: to increase the effectiveness of supervision, there must be changes not only in individual supervisors' attitudes, concepts, and skills, but also in the organizational structure of the school.

Premise C: during the process of increasing the effectiveness of supervision, a comprehensive organizational perspective must be taken.

Premise D: to maintain the effectiveness of supervision, problem-solving capacity must be built into the school organization.

DISCUSSION OF THE PREMISES

The unique organizational characteristics of schools. One of the biggest mistakes made in trying to improve supervision is to try to apply directly to a school a theoretical model of supervision without considering the readiness and capacity of that organization to use that model. For example, many schools have applied strictly the model of clinical supervision to their schools only to find that it does not work effectively. Some would criticize the model for this consequence. We suggest that it is not the integrity of the model that is in question, it is the wholesale attempt to lay that model on a school without changing the structure of the school to accept that model. The unique characteristics of a school may either support or constrain the implementation of any model of supervision.

Structural and individual change is required. It is not enough to chase after individual supervisors to change their knowledge and skills for supervising. There must also be changes within the school--changes in structure--to support a supervisor's new knowledge and skill. Examples of structures that may need changing to support supervision are policies and procedures, work schedules, job descriptions, teaming arrangements, and reward systems.

It is highly ineffective to focus change efforts to improve supervision on the individual supervisor. As a case in point consider the supervisor who attends a three day workshop on making classroom observations using the "Madeliene Hunter Approach." Then the supervisor returns to his school to discover that he has all of these new ideas and the beginnings of some new skills but that the structures of the school have not changed to support his new knowledge and skills. He still has to follow the daily schedules, he still has to complete the state mandated evaluation forms, he still has to steal time to have conferences, etcetera.

A comprehensive organizational perspective is required. Supervision is a process within a complex social system called a school district or within a school. To increase the effectiveness of supervision, this process must be viewed within the context of the entire system (either within the entire school district or within the entire school, depending on the focus which needs to taken). The relationship of the supervisory processes to the entire social system must be analyzed. This analysis helps to identify how different elements of the school system may hinder or support the process of supervision. This analysis also helps the supervisors to relate their work to the broader mission of the school.

Another aspect of developing a comprehensive organizational perspective is that the top management of a school district must be involved in any effort to increase the effectiveness of supervision. Specifically, we are saying that the superintendent of schools must be involved in the change effort. His or her commitment to this improvement process must be explicit in thought and action. This involvement not only helps the superintendent to learn about

the requirements for increasing the effectiveness of supervision, but it also communicates clearly to people in the school district that the superintendent wants and supports the needed changes.

Problem-solving capacity must be built into the school. Although an external consultant may be required to facilitate problem-solving in the early stages of a change effort to improve supervision, the people in the school district must learn to solve their own problems. This is a critical principle, for without problem-solving capacity within the school changes that have been made may not be maintained with the result being that the school returns to the same old ways of supervising.

THE ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF SUPERVISORY PRACTICE

What is supervisory practice? A practice is a sequence of actions which are undertaken by people to serve others. These others are considered clients. Each specific action within the practice repeats parts of other actions in the sequence, but each action is in some way unique (from Argyris and Schön, 1974, p.6). The practice of instructional supervision, therefore, is that sequence of actions performed by supervisors in schools to serve teachers and other education specialists. In school supervision, one element of supervisory practice is that sequence of actions called the cycle of clinical supervision (Cogan, 1973); i.e., the pre-observation conference, the observation, the analysis of data and selection of strategy, the post-observation conference, and the supervisor's self-evaluation. Other elements of supervisory practice include curriculum development, inservice training, relating to the public, and organization development (e.g., refer to Harris, 1975 for a more complete description of critical supervisory functions).

How do we analyze supervisory practice? Analyzing supervisory practice is simply a process of asking and answering questions about supervision within a school. The questions of analysis should be taken from the literature on instructional supervision and from an assessment of supervisory functions that are critical for an individual school, with more emphasis placed on the questions generated from within a school.

Let us share with you a real-life example of how one school is currently analyzing its supervisory practice. This description will be in an outline form.

Step 1: Top leaders recognize need to improve instructional supervision--an outside consultant is contacted and hired.

Step 2: A two day diagnostic retreat is scheduled--Superintendent, principals, and instructional supervisors are in attendance...focus of retreat is on organizational analysis using social systems model (see Figure 1)... relationship of various elements of the school are related to supervision...supervisory roles are clarified and discussed...at end of retreat individual team members set learning objectives for themselves in preparation for a second retreat two months later...purpose of learning is to study literature on instructional supervision and to assess the supervisory functions which must be in place within the school.

Step 3: Team members begin working toward their learning objectives.

Step 4: The second retreat happens...superintendent, principals, and instructional supervisors are present...additional members of organization (other support staff who are affected by changes in supervision)are now involved... focus is on synthesizing learning that occurred between the first and second retreats...purpose is to design a basic structure for a new, comprehensive program of supervision...an "in-house" change facilitator is identified...strategies for implementing changes are discussed...

Step 5: Team makes commitment to maintaining their change effort and takes steps to formalize that commitment (e.g., the superintendent talks of his continuing commitment and involvement and asks for reporting arrangements to be established so that he can continue to be kept informed about the details of the change effort)...a commitment is made to bring the consultant back as needed to facilitate the change effort.

The above description, because of its outline form, may create the illusion of oversimplication; but, in fact, the steps within the process were very complex and the information that was generated was very substantive. To help the reader to get a deeper sense of the kind of information that was generated as the result of this process, let us share with you some of the specific questions of analysis that were formulated.

- What are the operational characteristics of our supervisory system?

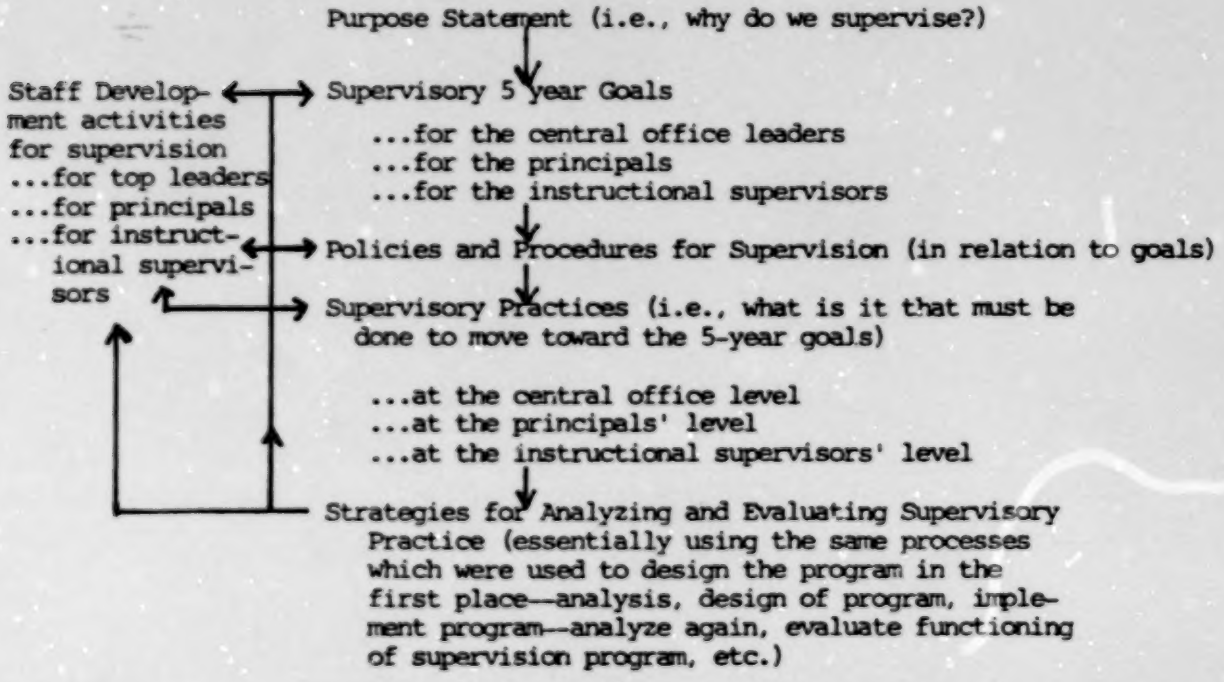
- o To what degree is leadership at various levels involved in supervision?
- o What are the teachers' attitudes toward supervision?
- o What are the supervisors' attitudes toward supervision?
- o What are the goals of supervision?
- o At what skill-levels are supervisors functioning?
- o What policies and procedures are in-place for supervision?
- o To what degree do policies and procedures either constrain or support supervision?
- o How is the school organized for supervision?
- o To what degree does the organization of the school either constrain or support supervision?
- o Which elements of various models of supervision make sense for our school?

The answers to the above, and other, questions provided the leaders in the school which has been referred to with rich data which were used, then, to design a full program of supervision which 1)took into account the unique characteristics of the school, 2) required changes in individuals and organizational structures, 3) was related to a comprehensive perspective of the organization, and 4) facilitated the development of problem-solving capacity within the school organization.

How do we evaluate supervisory practice? It is important to note that our focus here is not on the individual supervisor alone. We are proposing that supervisory practice across the organization must also be evaluated. To begin our discussion of evaluating supervisory practice, it may be helpful to describe what we mean by a program of supervision.

In our work in schools we have observed that many schools do not have a well-defined, recognizable program of supervision. Supervision is usually conceived of as twice a year observations of teachers for the purpose of evaluation. Other administrative functions, such as budgeting and scheduling, are also tied into the widespread notion of what supervision is in schools. In our minds, a program of supervision should have a well-defined and easily recognizable structure. The school that we have been referring to throughout this paper is designing a program of supervision with the following characteristics. We believe that these characteristics are applicable to any school, while the specific information within the program will vary from school to school depending on the unique characteristics of the school.

Figure 2: The general characteristics of a program of supervision


Purpose Statement (i.e., why do we supervise?)
Staff Development activities for supervision
...for top leaders
...for principals
...for instructional supervisors
Supervisory 5 year Goals
...for the central office leaders
...for the principals
...for the instructional supervisors
Policies and Procedures for Supervision (in relation to goals)
Supervisory Practices (i.e., what is it that must be done to move toward the 5-year goals)
...at the central office level
...at the principals' level
...at the instructional supervisors' level
Strategies for Analyzing and Evaluating Supervisory Practice (essentially using the same processes which were used to design the program in the first place--analysis, design of program, implement program--analyze again, evaluate functioning of supervision program, etc.)

Given the above structure and assuming that supervisory practice is informed by this structure (i.e., by the purpose statement, by the goals and objectives, et al), then the resulting supervisory practice may be evaluated. Specifically, what we are saying is that with this program of supervision in place and operating supervisory practice can then be compared to the goals that were set for it, to policies and procedures, etc. Additionally, and we believe more importantly, given supervisory practice that is the operationalization of the program of supervision, that that practice can then be evaluated to determine its effectiveness in solving problems of supervision. Given that the problems that the supervisory program is expected to solve are problems which are under control of supervisors, then we can use the following criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of supervisory practice.

1. Have the problems been solved?
2. Have the problems been solved within existing human, financial and technical constraints?
3. Have the problems been solved in such a way that people's willingness to be problem-solvers in the future has been either maintained or increased?

If the answers to each of these questions is positive, then we can say that the program of supervision is yielding effective supervisory practice. And we need to emphasize that all three of the above answers must be positive in order to judge supervisory practice to be effective.

Finally, it may be helpful to see some examples of problems which we believe are under the control of supervisors and which may be solved through the design and implementation of a comprehensive program of super-

supervision. These problems are only examples and do not represent a complete list of problems which are or should be under the control of supervisors.

1. to increase student achievement within a supervisory unit (e.g., within a department or within a building);
2. to develop a team spirit with involvement in decision-making;
3. to coordinate the development of a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of children, the school and the community;
4. to evaluate teaching performance in a way which will tend to improve instruction and promote the professional growth of the teachers; and,
5. to empower teachers within a supervisory unit to make and implement decisions about curriculum and instruction.

CONCLUSION

We have described for you a process for analyzing and evaluating supervisory practice in schools. We have based our suggestions on four major premises: 1) schools have unique organizational characteristics, 2) it is not enough to change individuals, we must also change organizational structures, 3) we must relate supervision to the entire organization, and 4) we must develop problem-solving capacity within the school. Our suggestions were described in relation to a real-life school which is currently engaged in the process of analyzing its supervisory practice, designing a comprehensive program of supervision, and planning to evaluate supervisory practice that will come from the implementation of that program.

In an era which is demanding excellence in education we passionately believe that the process-of-choice for helping schools to achieve excellence is instructional supervision. We know that there is no evidence to support our claim, but we submit that the potential for instructional supervision as an effective process for achieving excellence is high. To actualize this potential, we believe that supervision must be planned and implemented as a full program of supervision. We believe that supervisory practice must be analyzed and evaluated. We believe that it is possible for supervisors to help teachers to improve instruction and to grow professionally. To believe otherwise would be to abandon those practitioner-scholars who are working desparately and within unbelievable constraints as instructional leaders--principals, assistant principals, curriculum coordinators, program supervisors, instructional supervisors, supervisors of specific content areas, master teachers, supervising teachers.... We owe to these leaders a process within which they can be effective--a process within which they can make a difference. Instructional supervisory practice that is informed by a program of supervision is such a process.

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